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WHERE THE MILK BOTTLES GO, AND
MILK FOR SCHOOL LUNCHES

U.S. Department of Agriculture

A radio conversation between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, Mr. Ernest Kelly, Bureau of Dairy Industry, and Mr. Morse Salisbury, Office of Information, broadcast Thursday, September 15, 1938, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 93 associate radio stations.

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MORSE SALISBURY:

Your Home Economics reporter - Ruth Van Deman - is back again today. And she has with her Ernest Kelly of the Bureau of Dairy Industry and one of the Department's specialists on market milk. So I take it they're going to give us some new sidelights on the milk question.

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

Milk bottles, Morse. Mr. Kelly's been telling me some astonishing things about the high cost of milk bottles to the consumer.

SALISBURY:

Well some empty milk bottles almost cost me a sprained ankle this morning.

VAN DEMAN:

What happened?

SALISBURY:

Stepped out into a whole nest of 'em, by the curb, after I parked my car.

ERNEST KELLY:

Left there by men on some construction job probably.

SALISBURY:

Probably. But not so many left after I passed over.

VAN DEMAN:

Hope your tires won't get cut.

SALISBURY:

No. I took care of that.

KELLY:

Well, that's the way the milk bottles go.

VAN DEMAN:

Five milk bottles standing on the curb.

(over)

SALISBURY:

Take two milk bottles from five milk bottles - - -

KELLY:

Leaves three bottles to be returned to the bottle exchange.

VAN DEMAN:

But I think you said our national breakage rate is a lot higher than that.

KELLY:

Yes, we break up and lose about three hundred million milk bottles a year in these United States.

SALISBURY: (Whistling)

Must cost the dairymen quite a penny.

VAN DEMAN:

Something like ten million dollars, didn't you tell me, Mr. Kelly?

KELLY:

That was f.o.b. at factory prices. The bill to the dealers is more than ten millions. Every quart milk bottle costs the milk dealer on the average about 5 cents, even when he buys in carload lots.

VAN DEMAN:

Then I haven't any right to feel abused when the grocery store charges me a nickle for the bottle.

KELLY:

No, ma'am, you have not. But you'll help the milk dealer and yourself much more than a nickle's worth if you wash that bottle as clean as a whistle and take it back to the store. The loss of even one bottle wipes out the dealer's profit on a good many quarts of milk.

VAN DEMAN:

Which he gets back at me, I suppose, in the price he charges for his milk.

KELLY:

Certainly. That's only fair. He's merely lending you the bottle for your convenience.

SALISBURY:

Some stores don't make any charge for bottles.

KELLY:

And the mortality on their bottles is something terrific. If there isn't any charge for bottles, people put them into trash cans, and down the apartment incinerator, and use 'em for all sorts of purposes.

SALISBURY:

Some are salvaged of course through the milk bottle exchanges.

KELLY:

Oh yes. The exchanges are doing a lot to cut down losses and lengthen the life of bottles.

SALISBURY:

How many trips does a dairyman figure an average milk bottle will make?

KELLY:

About 30 if he belongs to a bottle exchange. If he doesn't use any system to get his bottles back, he'll be lucky if they make 20 trips.

VAN DEMAN:

Mr. Kelly, a minute ago, you remarked that a good consumer returns her milk bottles as clean as a whistle. Of course they're washed again at the milk plant ---

KELLY:

Yes, but if the milk's dried on, the mechanical washer may not get it all off. Then the bottle has to be washed by hand.

VAN DEMAN:

I see. Extra time, extra expense.

KELLY:

Exactly. And putting strong-smelling things like turpentine or kerosene in milk bottles is worse yet. If a bottle like that gets in with the others, it contaminates the whole batch. Then they all have to be re-washed and maybe re-rewashed.

SALISBURY:

More time, more labor, more money.

VAN DEMAN:

Well, I guess we'll have to develop a better code of milk bottle manners.

SALISBURY:

What about the paper milk bottle? Is that catching on very well?

KELLY:

In some of the large city stores, yes, where the loss on glass bottles is very high.

SALISBURY:

It's very light and easy to carry of course.

KELLY:

And practically sound-proof.

VAN DEMAN:

I depend on the clank of the milk bottles to wake me up in the morning.

I might not get to work on time.

KELLY:

You won't have to worry a while yet. The glass bottle is still more popular for general use.

VAN DEMAN:

Mr. Kelly, it's a little off from the subject of milk bottles, but two or three questions have come in about milk for school lunches that I'd like to put to you while I have this chance.

KELLY:

All right. I'll answer them if I can.

VAN DEMAN:

A year or two ago you and I had a talk about milk with the cream thoroughly shaken up in it--homogenized milk--I think you call it. --

KELLY:

That's right.

VAN DEMAN:

You still recommend homogenized milk for school lunches?

KELLY:

Yes, wherever it's available. It's the only way to be sure that youngsters will get their fair share of the cream from a bottle of milk.

VAN DEMAN:

Do many milk plants have homogenizing machines?

KELLY:

More are putting them in all the time. They can't afford to do it, of course, unless they have a good volume of trade.

VAN DEMAN:

But it wouldn't be out of order for a school committee or the P.T.A. to ask the dealer about homogenized milk when they're placing the order for the year's supply?

KELLY:

Very good idea. You remember we found that children generally leave about 5 percent of the bottle of milk served at school.

VAN DEMAN:

When they're drinking it through a straw, right from the bottle --

KELLY:

Yes. And though they give the bottle a shake or two, most of the cream stays near the top.

VAN DEMAN:

So what they leave in the bottle is about the richest part --

KELLY:

Yes, it's regular top milk, with about 16 percent of the fat from the whole bottle.

VAN DEMAN:

That's throwing away your vitamin A pretty fast. Well, what about pasteurized milk? If you were on a school committee would you vote for that?

KELLY:

Yes, ma'am, every time if it could be had in my community. And I'd look into the sanitary record of the dairy before it got the contract.

VAN DEMAN:

Where's that kept?

KELLY:

At the health department.

VAN DEMAN:

Of the county?

KELLY:

Or the city or the State.

VAN DEMAN:

Suppose they couldn't locate the sanitary record for that particular dairy?

KELLY:

Then I'd raise Ned until they did.

VAN DEMAN:

Not named Kelly for nothing.

KELLY:

Certainly not, when it comes to fighting for clean, wholesome milk for school kids. Sanitation is the most important thing.

VAN DEMAN:

Price is secondary.

KELLY:

Yes. Sanitation first, price second, on school lunch milk.

VAN DEMAN:

Thank you, Mr. Kelly, for this advice, of one who knows. And I'll listen to the clank of the 5 cent milk bottles with more respect in the future. And I'll try to return them washed as clean as a whistle.

SALISBURY:

Farm and Home friends, you've just heard Ruth Van Deman and Ernest Kelly of the Department of Agriculture discussing some of the consumer side of the market milk question. Many of you may already have the bulletin "Milk for the Family", which is the joint product of the two bureaus they represent--Home Economics and Dairy Industry. This bulletin carries a lot of information on choosing the milk supply and it might be very helpful to a school committee just at this time. The bulletin "Milk for the Family" is free if you send a card to Ruth Van Deman at the Bureau of Home Economics here in Washington, D. C.

Also the Bureau of Dairy Industry has published the results of its survey on "Milk-Bottle Losses and Ways to Reduce Them", and included a full description of the methods for operating a milk-bottle exchange. Very helpful for dairymen who are considering organizing such an exchange to cut down part of their distribution costs.

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